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ABSTRACT

The current movement toward observing both the process of reading in other languages and the areas of language interference is an important element in the education task. In a study which examined and described the observable process of oral reading by six bilingual children whose first and dominant language was Yiddish, the Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) was used as an instrument for analysis. The children (seven and eight years old) read aloud stories from a group of instructional reading texts in English and from a nonoverlapping set of selected story books in Yiddish. They then retold the stories in their own words. Data were tape recorded and analyzed. The study showed the RMI to be completely useful with a language having a different alphabetical and directional system. Results showed that silent correcting had occurred, that subjects gave significant evidence of processing print but that a gap existed between receptive and productive processing, that subjects were adept at gaining information from alternate sources, and that they felt no great need for their oral reading to sound like natural language. (JM)

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ORAL READING OF BILINGUAL YIDDISH/ENGLISH CHILDREN

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ORAL READING OF BILINGUAL YIDDISH/ENGLISH CHILDREN

Recent developments in education suggest that the melting pot theory of acculturation has not been actively valid. This theory has, in fact, resulted in the neglect of culturally different groups. A movement of great potential -- becoming more and more visible in education -- is one which recognizes cultural and linguistic differences; Bilingual-Bicultural Education.

Jewish education in the United States has and has always had a bilingual-bicultural context. Biblical injunctions that command Jews to perpetuate God's Own Words have motivated Jews to establish systems of formal education in every community where Jews have settled. Since the Holy Scriptures are written in Hebrew, observance of the religion requires that Jews learn to read Hebrew for the recitation of prayers and for the further study of the Holy Words as they appear in the Torah or in the Talmud. However, the "melting pot" philosophy which values political and economic acculturation is not embraced by the Chassidim, an ultra-religious Jewish sect. In their schools Chassidim do respect cultural factors and they do teach their children in their mother tongue, which is Yiddish. Theirs becomes an interesting case which can be used to test theoretical models of the process of learning to read.

This study examined and described the observable process of oral reading of six bilingual subjects, ranging in age from seven to eight, whose first and dominant language was Yiddish and for whom English was a second language. The subjects were Chassidic children, all born in the United States, and all pupils in private Chassidic schools. Yiddish, which was their first language, was the language

still spoken in their homes and by their teachers, except during four half-days of each week, for English instruction. Although all six were in the primary grades, they had different amounts of formal English instruction. Four subjects had received formal English reading instruction for from one to one-and-a-half years; two had learned to read English solely through informal instruction. For all of them earliest reading instruction began at age five with the Hebrew alphabet and the chanting of Hebrew sounds chorally or individually. Next came the reading of prayers. Later came instruction using Yiddish texts that dealt mainly with Biblical or historical stories.

Conclusions drawn about the reading behavior of the bilingual subjects in this study have implications for teachers of reading, teachers in all of the content areas, teacher educators and administrators in school districts who must assess, identify and provide appropriate bilingual-bicultural instruction for children.

Based on Kenneth S. Goodman's definition of the reading process as a psycholinguistic procedure which involves sampling, predicting, testing and confirming,[1] oral reading by the children was investigated through analysis of their oral reading miscues. The Reading Miscue Inventory (RMI) designed by Yetta M. Goodman and Carolyn C. Burke[2] was used as an instrument for analysis. Comprehension or Retelling guidelines developed in advance of each story, served to minimize bias in determining the Retelling Scores. The categories of the RMI did not require significant adjustments or accommodations to the linguistic features of the Yiddish language. To make these accessible to the general reader, miscues were translit-

erated from Yiddish to English for this report with accompanying translations.

The six subjects used in this study read stories from a group of instructional reading texts in English and from a non-overlapping set of selected story books in Yiddish. Upon completion of the oral reading tasks, subjects retold the stories in their own words. When the children were asked in advance which language they would prefer for their first oral reading selection, they invariably answered "Yiddish." They read the Yiddish story more quickly than they did the English story; and they seemed able to handle more difficult material in Yiddish.

The data were tape-recorded and analyzed, using two perspectives. A computer program designed for RMI Statistical Analysis and stored in the Michigan Time Sharing (MTS) library yielded individual data sheets for the subjects in each language. This program organizes scores for miscues percentages in each category of the RMI. Another computer program, available in Dartsmouth Time Sharing System (DTSS), SIMPREG, was used to do a regression analysis on the performances of the group. This program yielded means, standard deviations, and regression line statistics.

A major feature available in this study was the chance to investigate bilingual readers whose first language, Yiddish, does not use the Latin alphabet of their second language. There is not only this difference but also Yiddish is written and read from right to left. No significant influence on reading efficiency was found associated with alphabetic or directional switch. In only one instance

did a subject turn a page in the inappropriate direction, but he corrected himself immediately. No subject ever hesitated over the reading direction in either language once the reading had begun. This important finding corroborates K. Goodman's view that "whether the graphic sequence is from left to right, right to left, or top to bottom would be of little consequence to the basic reading process."[3] Goodman stated further that "only minor adjustments in the reading process are required to deal with any unusual correspondence feature" and that readers "can tolerate a great deal of irregularity, ambiguity and variability in orthographies without the reading process suffering."[4]

Another unusual feature of Yiddish is its high content of Hebrew words which are generally written without vowels; the absent vowel sounds are supplied by the reader through memory or intuition; these vowels produce dialect differences only on the sound level. No pattern emerged that evidenced any significant carry-over of this characteristic of Yiddish into English. K. Goodman's statement "that readers learn to rely more heavily on consonants" and that "they use vowel letters only when other information is inadequate"[5] seemed to apply to these readers. In the few instances when subjects interjected unrequired vowels into English words, or when they produced dialect variations, no interference with meaning resulted.

Conclusions can be drawn on the validity of using the RMI for analyzing miscues in a language other than English. The RMI considers three language sub-systems: graphophonic, syntactic and semantic. These sub-systems which are held to be universals for language, form the basis of the present study. Minor accommodations for the shape of the word for graphic similarity did not present a significant problem;

English transliterations supplied enough information to classify the miscue by RMI categories. For example, when the Expected Response was forshtelung (presentation) and the Oral Response was $forelung, the transliteration evidenced enough information for the miscue to be appropriately evaluated in graphophonic, syntactic (inflectional ending) and semantic($ non-word) categories. The flexibility of the RMI allowed the miscues to be analyzed by quality and to be classified according to how they affected comprehension of the full story.

The use of the RMI for analyzing and diagnosing reading efficiecy in Yiddish was entirely possible. In light of current legal requirements for identifying and assessing reading capabilities of Arabic, Chaldean, Korean,etc., bilingual children, an efficient descriptive instrument is urgently needed. The RMI can answer to this need. This research has shown the RMI's usefulness to persist even with a language that has a different alphabetical or a different directional system.

Previously published reports on reading miscues have claimed that the individual's reading proficiency cannot be determined simply by counting the miscues. This study confirms this finding. There was little relationship between Miscues Per Hundred Words (MPHW) and reading efficiency in either language, and there was little relationship between MPHW and duration of previous reading instruction. Subjects who had had English instruction for similar lengths of time showed no consistency in MPHW which varied from 2.9 to 10.5 MPHW.

The amount and type of miscue is not as revealing as the quality of the miscue -- another major premise of miscue research.

Consequently, miscues must be analyzed in the three sub-systems of language.

Graphically and phonemically, Yiddish miscues showed greater similarity to the expected response than did those in English. This was not surprising since Yiddish enjoys a higher sound to symbol relationship than does English. The graphophonic strategies produced the highest scores. Readers placed heavy reliance on graphophonic components when compared to reliance on other components. There was no significant correlation between use of graphophonic strategy and comprehending. Overuse of graphophonic components of language, with sacrifice of other sub-systems, was unproductive. The findings suggest that the "chanting" technique and early instructional emphasis on the mechanical nature of sounds as related to print had no beneficial influence on the way these readers attempted to get to meaning.

Relatively high percentages indicated that a strong syntactic pull operated during the oral reading of both stories and suggested that the readers had substantial control over the grammatical system in both languages. Miscues for the group that are acceptable syntactically and which include at least partial use of grammatical relationships, were more frequent in Yiddish than in English. The greater efficiency in the reader's total use of the syntactic cues in Yiddish may have been the result of the highly inflectional system in Yiddish.

While no generalization can be offered from these results, several modest conclusions must be considered. The suggestion that the

reader's oral performance did not always give an accurate picture of the degree of his understanding is based on related research which shows that bilingual readers when they hear themselves reading in a second language cannot always produce an answer to the question "Does this sound like English?" Nor do they always feel the need to correct miscues, even if they know how to. Other times they recognize what they have heard themselves read to be alien to natural language, but they do not know how to make the correction. The influence which earlier instruction has on the reader's approach to print has been shown to be a significant variable. In particular, the technique of "chanting" so characteristic of these subjects' earliest instruction produces little motivation to correct, since pausing, or worse, "going back" interferes with the flow of sound. Additionally, reading instruction for Chassidic children has its own cultural value. No overriding need exists for these children to make oral reading sound like natural language, since values other than meaning also count for them in oral reading.

The texts themselves represented another variable, since their levels of difficulty differed. The Yiddish texts, unlike those in English, had no illustrations and contained inordinately long constructions, frequently from twenty-five to thirty-five words per sentence. The Yiddish stories presented greater difficulty for the subjects to follow in story line. Also the content of the stories was not closely related to everyday experiences. The Yiddish texts were more abstract and were more difficult for the readers to handle than were the English texts. This last variable must be considered as an

inherent limitation of the study. The problem of trying to provide equal challenges for each subject was not completely successful. K. Goodman and C. Burke found this same difficulty.[7]

In summary, analysis of the quality of the miscues, as related to Comprehending and Retelling leads to the following conclusions: that silent correcting had occurred; that the subjects gave significant evidence of processing print but that a gap existed between receptive and productive processing; that these readers were adept at gaining information from alternate sources, e.g. pictures and their own experiences; that they felt no great need for their oral reading to sound like natural language; that this last feature may have been rooted in the cultural aspect of the Cassidic training and early instruction, which assigns low priority to reading for meaning during childhood.

Studies that observe the process of reading in other languages; studies that observe areas of language interferences are all essential elements of a major and current education task. In its broadest context, Joshua A. Fishman has addressed himself to this movement:

> The day is coming when more and more and more genuine bilingual education for all who want it, regardless of income, mother tongue or language at home, will be part of a variegated picture of American education. At that time it will not be a mere euphemism for programs in English as Second Language, which though unquestionably essential, constitute only one part of a dual language education. . . . It will be available to any children and grandchildren, and to yours and mine, because it is too good, to keep it from all the people.[8]

FOOTNOTES

1. Kenneth S. Goodman, "Psycholinguistic Universals in the Reading Process," Journal of Typographic Research (Spring 1970).

2. Yetta M. Goodman and Carolyn L. Burke, Reading Miscue Inventory (New York; Mac Mullan, 1972).

3. K. Goodman, "Psycholinguistic Universals," p. 108.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid., p. 109

6. Kenneth S. Goodman and Carolyn L. Burke "Theoretically Based Studies of Patterns of Miscues in Oral Reading Performances," (Washington, D.C.; U.S. Department of Health Education and Welfare Project -- OEG o-9-320375-4269, 1973).

7. Ibid., p.28.

8. Joshua A. Fishman, "The Politics of a Bilingual Education," in Twenty First Annual Round Table Bilingualism and Language Contact, ed: J.E. Alatis, Monograph Series in Language and Linguistics, No. 23 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1970), p. 53.